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SUBJECT: POLLING RESULTS: LUKASHENKO SUPPORT REMAINS HIGH IN WAKE OF
ENERGY CRISIS

Summary

¶1. According to latest polling results of independent pollster Andrey Vardomatskiy, Lukashenko's public support remains at 51.3% while de facto coalition leader Milinkevich's support rating dwindles to 4.0%. A large portion of respondents approve of Lukashenko's handling of the gas-oil conflict and doubt that the rise in gas prices will have a significant effect on the economy. Even those who disagree with the president's handling of the crisis doubt a significant downturn in the economy would affect his hold on power. Interest in the EU continues to rise. End summary.

¶2. On April 24, Andrey Vardomatskiy, Director of the independent polling service NOVAK, delivered to Poloff the results of his March 18-25 polling. NOVAK interviewed 1,095 Belarusians in various regions and cities of Belarus.

Continued Support for Lukashenko and His Regime

¶3. According to NOVAK, Lukashenko's public support rating remains at 51.3%, while his closest competitors, de facto coalition leader Aleksandr Milinkevich and jailed presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin, enjoy single digit support ratings (4.0% and 2.2%, respectively). Many Belarusians support Lukashenko, despite the recent Russian-Belarusian energy crisis, and predict support for the leader will not waiver, even if the economy suffers:

"Overall, how would you assess the political situation in Belarus?
It is..."

	January	March
Safe	7.4(%)	12.7
Peaceful	67.8	67.8
Strained/Tense	19.5	13.9
Critical/explosively dangerous	0.9	0.9
Undecided/no answer	4.3	4.6

"With which opinion about President Lukashenko do you rather agree?"

Respected leader	44.9(%)
Last dictator in Europe	10.8
Single real friend of Russia	12.7
Cunning and insidious/capable of anything	13.8
Hard to say	14.5

"How right or wrong were the actions of the Belarusian President during the "oil-gas" conflict?"

Absolutely right	21.9(%)
Rather right	38.5
Rather wrong	15.5
Absolutely wrong	7.4
Hard to say	15.8

"Will Lukashenko remain in power following the economic consequences of the conflict?"

Yes	81.9(%)
No	5.7
Hard to say	11.0

14. Forty-five percent of respondents predict that the Belarusian economy will suffer "severely" and the standard of living will drop considerably as a result of the energy crisis. Roughly 44% agree that there will be certain difficulties, but concluded that there will not be any significant consequences to Belarus' economy. Belarusians are split on how the consequences of the conflict will affect the people's support of the GOB:

"How will Belarusians' attitudes to the current regime change in consequence of the conflict? Confidence will..."

Definitely increase	10.6(%)
Rather increase	28.0
Rather decrease	30.3
Definitely decrease	9.7
Hard to say	20.5

"Do you think Belarus faces the problem of shortage of energy resources today?"

Certainly yes	22.9(%)
Rather yes	35.2
Rather no	23.2

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Certainly no	5.0
Hard to say	13.2

Union with EU vs. Russia

15. Approximately 33.5% of respondents think that citizens would live better if Belarus integrated with the EU, whereas 46.7% believe citizens would live better in a union with Russia or Ukraine. However, an increasing amount of people support integration in the EU and oppose unifying with Russia:

"If the referendum on Belarus joining the EU were held today, would you personally voter "for" or "against?"

	January	March
For integration into the EU	35.7(%)	39.2
Against integration with the EU	30.5	29.4

"Do you think Belarus should intensify the process of rapprochement with the EU?"

Yes	49.7(%)
No	30.6
Hard to say	18.1

"If the referendum on unification of Belarus and Russia into a single state were held today, would you personally vote "pro" or "contra?"

	January	March
Against unification	40.1(%)	46.4
For unification	35.2	30.7
Would not vote	10.6	9.2
Undecided/no answer	12.8	13.8

"Do you think the integration process between Belarus and Russia

should be intensified?"

Yes	46.4(%)
No	30.7
Hard to say	13.6

"Which of the following variants of Russia-Belarus unification do you personally like most?"

Belarus becomes an oblast of Russia	5.2(%)
A union similar to the EU	37.6
Remain as is according to current Union Treaty	26.1
Against unification	19.4
Hard to say/no answer	11.7

Standard of Living Remains Stable

16. The consequences of the Russian-Belarusian energy conflict, according to those polled, have not affected the average Belarusian citizen. According to OVAK's polling, 61.7% of respondents believe the Belarus' economic situation has remained the same whereas only 21.8% believe that it has worsened:

"How would you assess Belarus' current economic situation?"

	January	March
Very Good	1.2(%)	1.0
Good	16.2	17.3
Fair	58.3	58.6
Bad	17.5	17.7
Very bad	2.6	1.4
Can't say/No answer	1.3	4.1

17. Approximately 70% of those polled said their household's material situation remained the same, which 63% described as "fair." Eighty-one percent doubted mass actions protesting price increases and the fall of the standard of living would take place in their town/district and an equal amount claimed they would not participate in such actions should they occur

Comment

18. The increase in energy prices has not had a significant effect on Belarusians' standard of living, but Belarusians have yet to pay for gas at the rate Russia is charging the GOB. Accordingly, many respondents continue to support the president, even if they disagree with his handling of the energy crisis. Although respondents claim

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that they would not participate in any demonstrations protesting economic problems or a drop in their standard of living, or that the president will remain in power in the event of such a crisis, we will see how attitudes change when the cash-strapped GOB is unable to sustain key social and economic benefits to voters.

STEWART